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ABSTRACT

This learning module, which is part of a three-block series intended to help human service workers develop the skills necessary to solve the problems encountered in their daily contact with elderly clients of different cultural backgrounds, deals with communication and adjustment from the standpoint of the cultural heritage of elderly Native Canadians. The first main section identifies several verbal and nonverbal communication practices that are specific to elderly Native Canadians. Native cultural behaviors surrounding adjustment to selected life events and psychological reactions to them are discussed. Special attention is paid to the Native Canadians' reactions to disability and outlook toward institutions. The next section suggests ways in which human services workers can communicate with elderly Native Canadians and help them adjust to aging. A list of selected readings and descriptions of 10 pertinent films are appended. (MN)

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BLOCK B

Cultural Gerontology

MODULE B.4.1 Communication and Adjustment

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COMMUNICATION AND ADJUSTMENT

MODULE B.4.1

The Elderly Service Workers' Training Project wishes to express appreciation of the following individuals who have contributed to the development of the "Communication and Adjustment" module B.4.1.

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INTRODUCTION

This module on Native Elderly Communication and Adjustment is based on on-site interviews held with the Native elderly population and staff employed on a nursing home reserve in Northern Manitoba.

This module will introduce the concerns that arise when the Native elderly live in an environment where they are unable to adequately converse with others around them. This is in contrast to situations where they are with their families or living in an institution which is staffed by Native workers and caregivers.

Communicating properly with others helps one's adjustment to disability or change in living environment. Other culturally specific concerns which surround Native elderly adjustment will be examined.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

- (1) identify several verbal and non-verbal communication practices specific to Native elders,
- (2) identify Native cultural behaviours surrounding adjustment to selected life events and psychological reactions to them,
- (3) describe ways in which the worker can facilitate adjustment of the Native elderly.

The following section will present both verbal and non-verbal communication practices specific to Native elders.

COMMUNICATION

Upon completion of this section you will be able to identify several verbal and non-verbal communication practices specific to Native elders.

Communication is a basic, yet vital human function that we daily use for interpersonal relationships. It can involve verbal and/or non-verbal practices.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Practices

For many Native elderly a language barrier exists if English is the language used by human service workers. In Manitoba, the Native languages are Cree, Ojibway, Chippewyan or Dene, Dakota, the Island Lake Dialect (similar to Cree) and Michief (French). There are some Native elderly who are able to speak only English but the majority speak a Native language.

The following is based on observations made at a nursing home on a Reserve in northern Manitoba, where all of the residents speak a Native language (mainly Cree, but a few of the residents speak other Native languages).

Most human service workers are able to communicate with the Native elderly residents in some form. Those who are not able to speak the Native language manage to communicate by learning to ask such questions as "What would you like?" or "Where would you like to go?" This is fine providing the elder does not continue with a long explanation. In such a situation, the human service worker may be faced with a communication breakdown. It is essential that an interpreter be relied upon to bridge such a gap.



When the human service worker is unable to communicate in the respective Native language, he or she should then

Speak English as slowly and clearly as possible, using short sentences. Should the elderly not be hard of hearing, shouting is not necessary. In all cases the Native elderly should be treated with respect and care.

The individuals that are hard of hearing usually should be spoken to in a loud, yet friendly manner. Every effort should be made to accommodate interaction and communication regardless of disability.

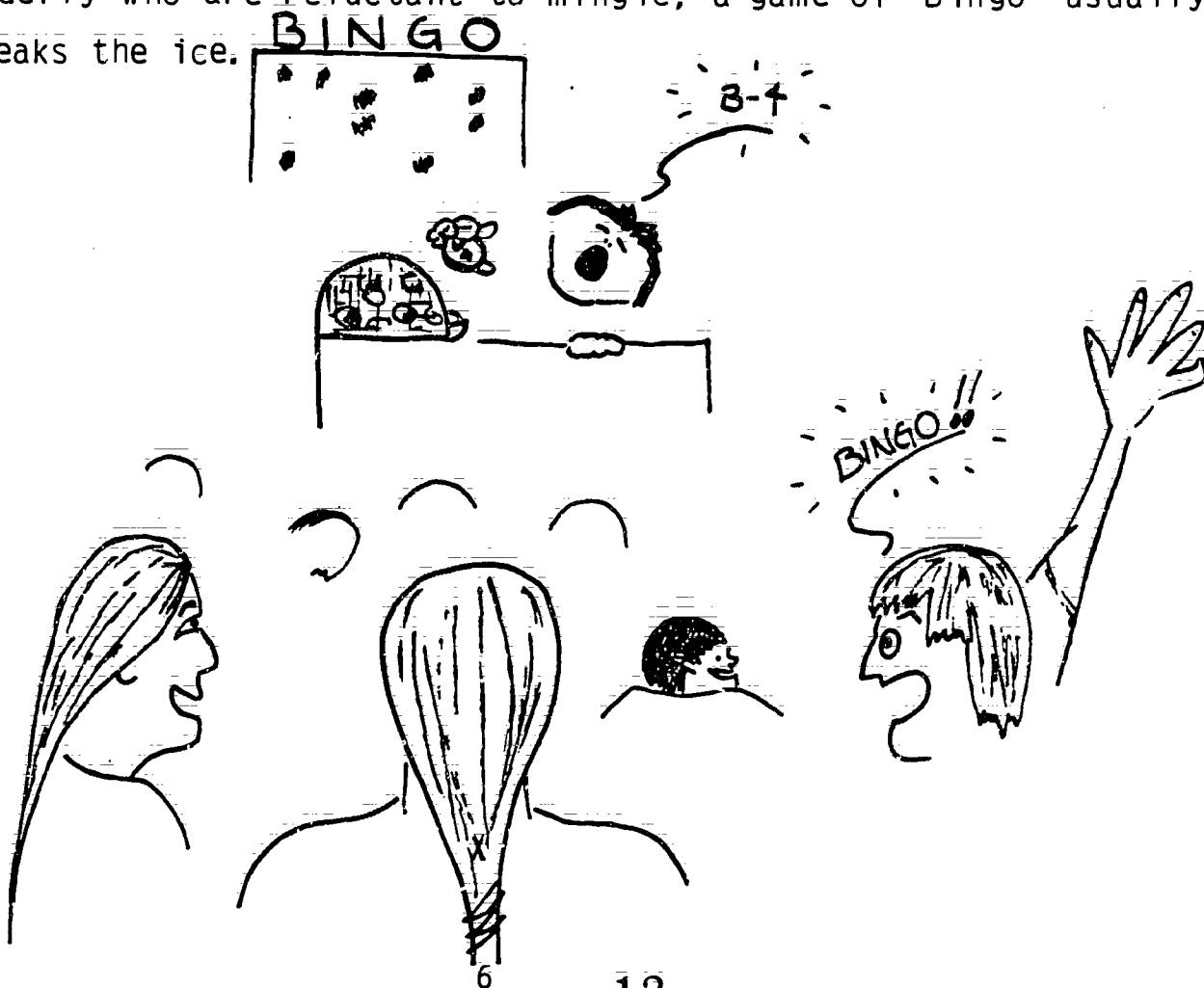
Despite the modernization of society, the Native elderly have maintained a vast knowledge of their culture. Their education is primarily experiential in nature and culturally based. It is important to realize that Native people never lived in a language vacuum. They communicated and continue to communicate in highly developed Native languages, whether it be Cree, Ojibway, Dakota or the Island Lake Dialect.

They are fully committed to preserving their languages and all that this implies. They have, as a result of their languages, fully developed concepts, ways of categorizing things and ways of thinking. The Native elderly sometimes may decide to use their language for other purposes. They sometimes will use it as a defense mechanism. For instance, if the elderly are asked to perform something they do not want to do, they may give the appearance of not understanding.

Their reason may be valid, but to explain it is sometimes difficult for them.

Communicating with non-Native speaking workers can lead to frustrations unless provisions for interpreters are made.

The interaction of the Native elderly among themselves is open and friendly. Not all Native elderly residents speak the same language. However, they feel responsible and try to help each other communicate. Each attempts to talk in his or her language, which sometimes evokes a response of frustration, in particular with an elder who speaks a different dialect. The Native elderly who do not willingly communicate with others should be encouraged to do so in a number of ways. They can be taken to the common room so that they can be among the other Native elderly. From the communication which could take place, a positive influence can occur over a given time period. Also, most Native elderly enjoy the game of "Bingo". For the Native elderly who are reluctant to mingle, a game of "Bingo" usually breaks the ice.



The Native elderly have few problems understanding the game even though it is played in English. Communication has a tendency to increase after each game. The reluctant Native elderly usually participate and enjoy the company as well as the game.

However, there are situations where an elderly Native speaks only a Native language while the worker speaks only English. A communication gap exists, when neither the worker nor the elder understand each other. This can be distressing.

The following section will present culturally specific behaviours surrounding adjustment to selected life events and psychological reactions to them.

ADJUSTMENT TO SELECTED LIFE EVENTS

Upon completion of this section you will be able to identify Native cultural behaviours surrounding adjustment to selected life events and psychological reactions to them.

Native elderly differ not only in their capacity for self-maintenance, but also in their upbringing: environmental circumstances such as housing, social contacts and family. These examples of variations can contribute to differences in social institutional adjustments. One aspect worth noting is that like most older adults, the Native elderly prefer to remain independent in a home setting for as long as they possibly can.

Health, an important variable differs due to time with each individual. In later years, however, most of the elderly adjust to their disability and ill-health. In other circumstances, they may not recognize signs which warn them that they may need medical treatment. This is also true of the Native elderly. People come to terms with their health problems in various ways, there

is no standard or best mode of adjustment. If a sense of continuity and identity can be maintained in spite of the physiological, social and psychological changes, the process of re-engagement can continue. This sense of continuity and identity is crucial to Native elderly who enter a nursing home and now must attempt to adjust to the new environment.

Psychological Reaction to Disability

Traditionally, the Native elderly have lived within a well organized structured community where family life was very closely knit and where to a large extent this practice continues today. However, today when the elderly become mentally or physically unable to care for themselves and when the family is unable to give them the care they need, nursing home care is usually arranged. The Native elderly adjust much better to this kind of situation if they feel that they have some decision in selecting an institution. They also adjust and settle in sooner if they have a sense of continuity to their life. Regardless of their circumstances, the Native elderly continue to have an everlasting concern for their family members and psychologically maybe affected if not given opportunities to maintain on-going family contact.

The acceptance or adjustment to disability or illness is very often an individual matter. This is probably true of all elderly. In the case of most Native elderly their hope is that one day they will return to their homes and be around their families and loved ones. Marked improvements can occur if they are able to have

visitors on a regular basis or are able to return home for short visits.

Generally, the Native elderly accept their illnesses, not as a will of God, but as part of the aging process. They are determined to be psychologically strong and to have the courage to endure their illness or disability. However, there are exceptions for some may feel aggravated by the aging process and are unable to accept this change under any circumstances. For most, however, their acceptance is expressed through the continuation of life in the best way they know how. Their determination is generally expressed internally through stillness and silence.



This internalization is the Native elderly's coping mechanism. It does not mean that the Native elderly are immune from physical or mental pain, or that they do not require the help of human service workers. It does mean, however, that their coping skills with regards to pain are different from the dominant culture.

The Native elderly accept their disability easier than the illness or disability of another family member. This is true, because their culture strongly believes in the extended family system. They are very concerned about the well-being of any of their grandchildren. This sense of responsibility is deeply ingrained within the Native culture.

Insight Into Native Outlook Towards Institutions

In general, personal care homes are aesthetically pleasing, but there is usually a vacuum in the new milieu, a lack of fulfillment of the cultural and social needs of the Native elderly. This is very intimidating to the Native whose way of life included a very large, independent environment, busy with fulfilling activities, accustomed to playful children and close

neighbourhood. The Native elderly further must make a painful psychological adjustment for they must deal with separation from family members and especially loss of status in their community.



There is another dimension of the Native elderly that makes them skeptical of institutions. Why is this the case? Because they may have had negative

experiences with boarding schools, churches and other dominant culture institutions. These experiences do not present pleasant recollections. Institutions are a sign of trouble and tend to fill them with apprehension. Most of the dominant culture institutions that they have come in contact with have taken away some part of their culture and their dignity.

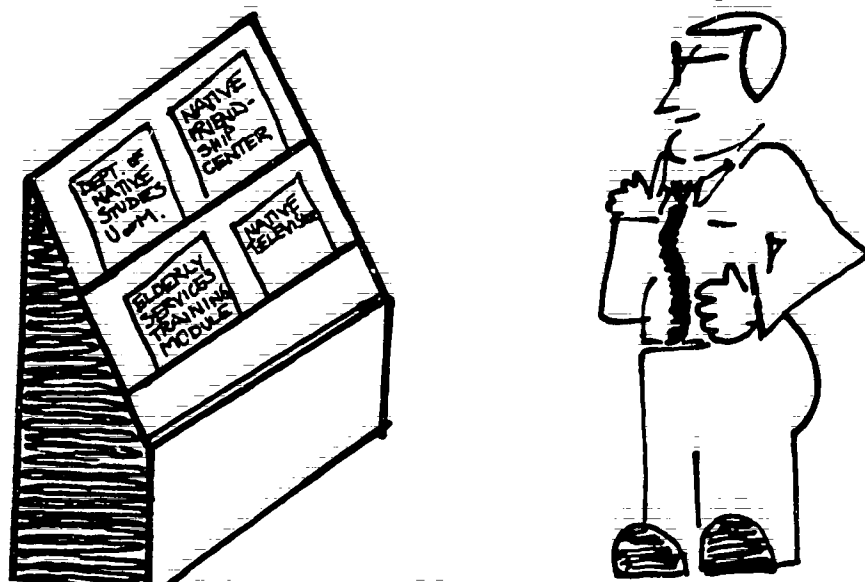
Once they are placed in a personal care home, they may feel not only lost but unable to cope. They may also tend to withdraw and may even refuse to eat. Adjustment is not an easy process, and is especially hard when the separation and adjustment periods have to be done in isolation, in an alien culture setting and where the human service workers are non-Native. It is not the aging process that is distressing to the Native elderly, it is the loss of their independence and the constricting atmosphere of the institution.

The following section will present ways in which the worker can help facilitate adjustment to selected life events.

HOW THE WORKER CAN FACILITATE ADJUSTMENT

Upon completion of this section you will be able to describe ways in which the worker can facilitate adjustment of the Native elderly.

The human service worker can play an important role in facilitating an elder's adjustment. The most effective role that the worker can play is one of attempting to understand the reason why the Native elder is behaving in a particular manner. Cultural differences are very important. Some knowledge of the Native culture and appreciation will go a long way to



helping the elder as well as the worker. It is very

important to treat the Native elder with dignity and respect. Remember that silence does not mean consent or acceptance, in fact, it may be just the opposite. Find out by asking the Native elderly person through an interpreter or another member of the family what they are experiencing.

The worker must be sensitive and aware that Native elderly, regardless of their illness or disability, still require certain social needs. Whenever possible, the human service worker should encourage the interaction of Native elderly. It would be particularly helpful if the other Native elderly were brought together as often as possible. If interaction is not possible with others and Native residents are not available, then it would be wise to encourage members of the family to facilitate this interaction. Interpreters and the Native Friendship Centres throughout the cities and small towns can be located to aid with concerns. Most vital, however, is that the human service worker get to know the Native elderly and pay attention to their needs. Workers who are in daily contact with Native elderly play a crucial part in the aging process, that of helping the Native elder to adjust.

SUMMARY

This Communication and Adjustment module described in general terms the concerns of the Native elderly as observed in a nursing home situated in a Northern Native community. These concerns differ somewhat in an urban setting where the human service workers may be English speaking and where the majority of the residents are non-Native. The Native elderly appear to be fairly content in an institution that is run by Native people in a Native community. One should not view this as though they do not want to return home to be close to their families.

Rather, the module has shown that regardless of their circumstances, the Native elderly continue to have an everlasting concern for their family members and psychologically may be affected if not given opportunities to maintain on-going family contact.

The human service worker can play an important role in facilitating the elderly's adjustment. Some knowledge of the Native culture and appreciation will go a long way to helping the elder as well as the worker.

Finally, communication, (verbal and non-verbal) must be evident and positive. This emphasis can lead the Native elderly to live their lives in a more content way.

APPENDIX

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Selected Readings

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Additional Resources

Place: National Film Board of Canada
245 Main St.
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 1A7

Augusta

This film is the portrait of an 88-year-old Indian woman who lives alone in a log cabin without running water or electricity. She recalls past times, but lives very much in the present. Self-sufficient, dedicated to her people, she spreads warmth wherever she moves with her songs, her harmonica and her soft-voiced comments. (Award: San Francisco).

16 minutes:33 seconds 106C 0176 178

The People Of This Land

This is a report on the situation of Canada's Native people "south of the 60°," in which economic development of the North, land claims, and social and cultural problems of the Inuit, Indians and Metis are discussed with government officials and Native representatives. Host Barbara Frum also looks at the vast land claims made by Native people in the North; the Inuit, Cree and Dene are determined to get a better political deal than the treaties negotiated with Natives in the South. Produced by CBC.

86 minutes:20 seconds 106C 0178 432

People Of The Sacred Circle

At the Indian Ecumenical Conference in the summer of 1975, signs of discontent emerged: the young demanded changes; the old resisted contemporary pressures; the presence of white film crews drew dark, resentful glances; and the rain fell and fell - an omen, some said, from the disapproving gods. The resulting program looks not only at the special events of this yearly week-long study session, but at the internal problems of preserving something called "Indianness."

27 minutes:50 seconds 106C 0176 157

Place: National Film Board Of Canada Cont'd

The Longhouse People (La Grande Maison)

The life and religion of the Longhouse People. We see how the Iroquois of today still maintains a link with a proud past. The film, produced in 1951, shows a rain dance, a healing ceremony and a celebration in honor of a newly chosen chief. (Award: Canadian Film Award.) Produced with cooperation of Canadian Six Nations Iroquois Indians and National Museums of Canada.

23 minutes:2 seconds 106C 0151 012

Mother Of Many Children (Mere de tant d'enfants)

This film is an album of Native womanhood, portraying a once proud matriarchal society which for centuries has been pressured to adopt different standards and customs, but which is now fighting for equal status and opportunity. (Awards: San Francisco; Dieppe.) Produced by NFB in collaboration with Indian and Northern Affairs, Secretary of State.

57 minutes:50 seconds 106C 0177 518

The Land Is The Culture

Produced by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, **The Land Is The Culture** tells of lands stripped from the Indians, of roads and railways driven through reserves without consultation, and of hunting and fishing conflicts - all of which documents the fact that the Indians' struggle for land claims is not just one of geography or recompense in dollars, but of cultural survival. Available in the Pacific Region only. For purchase, contact Pacific Cinematheque Pacifique.

30 minutes 106C 0176 313

Place: National Film Board Of Canada Cont'd

The Great Spirit

Many of the nearly 300 000 registered Canadian Indians are finding a new sense of solidarity in their traditional beliefs. This film presents a rare glimpse of Canada's Native peoples' sacred places, rituals, and ceremonies, as they re-discover their ancient religious heritage and renew their sense of Indian identity. Produced by CBC.

27 minutes:50 seconds 106C 0178 387

Circle Of The Sun (Le Soleil perdu)

At the 1961 gathering of the Blood Indians of Alberta the exciting spectacle of the Sun Dance was captured on film for the first time. The film also reflects the predicament of the young generation - those who relinquished their ties with their own people but have not yet found a firm place in a changing world. (Eight awards, including London;Brussels;Toronto.)

29 minutes:13 seconds 106C 0161 035

Cree Way

John Murdoch, principal of the Indian Affairs school at Rupert House, James Bay, and his wife Gerti have initiated a curriculum development project using local people and resources. The teaching materials are drawn from Cree folklore, are mainly in Cree and make use of old photographs, artefacts and books that are written and printed in the community. The school year is organized so that pupils have time to go hunting and fishing with their families. This innovative approach makes local control of education a reality in Native communities.

26 minutes:18 seconds 106C 0177 155

Place:National Film Board Of Canada Cont'd

Nonoonse Anishinabe Ishichekewin Ka Kanawentank

Each spring, for more than 40 years, 68-year-old Nonoonse has crossed Lake Manitoba's fragile ice to tap the delicate maples on Sugar Island. She always brings along some members of her large extended family so grandchildren and great-grandchildren too can learn, and thereby help to keep alive, the Saulteaux traditions of their ancestors.

This quiet and reflective film with a soundtrack that features natural sounds, comments by Nonoonse, and minimal voice-over narration, presents a clear picture of the sugaring process but, more important, suggests how traditions function as the "cement" that keeps a culture together. The role of women in preserving and transmitting such traditions is also touched upon in two other films about Native women, **Augusta** and **Mother of Many Children**.

10 minutes:17 seconds

106C 0680 054

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ELDERLY SERVICE WORKERS' TRAINING PROJECT (ESWTP)

TITLES OF THE TRAINING PROJECT'S MODULES

Block A: Basic Knowledge of Aging Process

- A.1 Program Planning for Older Adults **
- A.2 Stereotypes of Aging **
- A.3 Human Development Aspects of Aging **
- A.4 Social Aspects of Aging **
- A.5 Physiological Aspects of Aging **
- A.6 Death and Bereavement **
- A.7 Psychological Aspects of Aging **
- A.8 Confusion and the Older Adult **
- A.9 Nutrition and the Older Adult **
- A.10 Listening and the Older Adult **

Block B: Cultural Gerontology

- B.1 Ukrainian Culture **
 - B.1.1 Communication and Adjustment *
 - B.1.2 Communication and Adjustment *
- B.2 German Culture **
 - B.2.1 Communication and Adjustment *
- B.3 French Culture *
 - B.3.1 Communication and Adjustment *
- B.4 Native Culture *
 - B.4.1 Communication and Adjustment *
 - B.4.2 Communication and Adjustment *

Block C: Work Environment

- C.1 Work Environment I *

Resource Materials:

Handbook of Selected Case Studies
User's Guide
ESWTP Authoring System
ESWTP Final Report

Please Note:

ALL MODULES ARE AVAILABLE IN THE PRINT FORMAT. THE CODE
FOR IDENTIFYING OTHER FORMATS IS LISTED BELOW.

Code	/	Format
*	/	Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) Courseware
**	/	Interactive Video (Tape)/Computer-Assisted Television Courseware

ROVEMENT (OEF